

Re-reading Mission in the Age of Interculturality – The International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM)

Catholic missiologists are organized globally in the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM). The purpose of the IACM is to foster and promote effective cooperation in specialist research and training as well as in the publishing activities of Catholic missionaries around the world¹. The founding conference of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists, jointly instigated by two missiologists, Jesus Lopez-Gay (Pontifical Gregorian University) and Paolo Giglioni (Pontifical Urban University), was held in Rome in the year 2000. Four years previously, in

¹ The IACM statutes state the following as regards the purpose of the association: “The IACM exists for the purpose of promoting missiological research, studies and educational activities and encouraging collaboration among Catholic missiologists. Although the Association and its members affirm their specifically Roman Catholic identity, the IACM seeks to promote the unity and common witness of all the disciples of Jesus Christ, to foster true dialogue with all people, with their own religious and cultural traditions, and to participate in interdisciplinary approaches to understanding human beings in their relations to God, to each other and to all of God’s creation. The Association is at the service of missionary activity in its specific sense, as it has come to be understood since the Second Vatican Council, without, however, losing sight of the missionary dimension of other activities of the Church. The specific objectives of the IACM include the following: (1) To foster fellowship among Catholic missiologists, thus encouraging them to contribute personally and collectively to the objectives of the Association. (2) To promote scholarly studies of questions relating to the missionary nature and activity of the Church, encouraging theologians in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Church’s tradition and in full ecclesial communion (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22). (3) To contribute to the content and quality of missiological education and formation, not only in Catholic academic faculties and institutes dedicated to this specialisation, but also in programmes for the initial and continuing formation of the clergy, religious and laity in the local Churches. (4) To be at the service of the diverse local Churches in their mission of evangelising all peoples and all human situations. (5) To identify, investigate and analyse the missionary challenges present in both perduring and newly emerging human contexts. (6) To further biblical, theological, historical, pastoral, religio-cultural and social science studies related to the evangelising mission of the Church; (7) To promote mutually enriching relationships with other Christian missiologists and with other scholars dedicated to mission-related studies. (8) To organise academic encounters (scientific congresses, symposia, workshops, etc.) on missiological questions of current and fundamental importance. (9) To cooperate with existing missiological reviews, by means of articles produced by its members, and eventually publish its own bulletin or review. The IACM shall work in close collaboration with other international, regional or national missiological societies.” (Statutes of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM), Rome 2000).

1996, the two missiologists had initially sounded out the extent of potential interest in a worldwide association of Catholic missiologists. In view of the positive response they received, a working group was set up in 1997 which resolved to found an association of missiologists and elected Ortrud Stegmaier as its secretary (Lazar, Górski 2006, ix). The following year, 1998, a second meeting of the working group of Catholic missiologists was held which drafted statutes for the association and elected Adam Wolanin as its first ‘provisional president’. He was followed shortly afterwards by Sebastian Karotemprel, who invited representatives of 15 missiological institutes to a meeting in Rome in 1999. This meeting proposed that the First IACM Plenary Assembly should be held in 2000 at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome (Lazar, Górski 2006, x).

At this stage, however, numerous objections were raised to the founding of an association of Catholic missionaries.² The representatives of the objectors, among them Arnulf Camps, a Franciscan teacher at the University of Nijmegen, saw in the IACM initiative a “denominationalist stance”, in particular with respect to the ecumenically based International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS). This organisation had been founded in 1962 as a specialist, international, interdenominational and interdisciplinary association for the study of biblical, theological and empirical aspects of the Christian mission and of intercultural theology. The dissenters argued against the founding of an independent association of Catholic missiologists and in favour of setting up a branch of Catholic missiologists within the International Association for Mission Studies. Despite the reservations expressed with respect to the founding of a separate organisation of Catholic missiologists those advocating an independent organisation of Catholic missiologists ultimately won the day.

First Plenary Assembly (Rome / Vatican) in 2000

The IACM Constitutive Assembly was held on Saturday, 21 October 2000 in the Aula Magna of the Urban University. Over fifty participants from six continents attended this assembly, among them as an observer Birger Nygaard, General Secretary of the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) (Oborji). In his welcoming address Ambrogio Spreafico, Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Urban University, underlined the significance of an international association of missiologists. Sebastian Karotemprel provided an overview of the background to the founding of the IACM. He also reported on the colloquium on “Promoting Mission Studies: The Role of Missiological Institutes” (Karotemprel, Puthenpurakal, Fernandez).

The International Association of Missiologists was then formally constituted and its statutes adopted. An Executive Board was elected with John Gorski³ as the organi-

² I am indebted to Franz Wijsen (Nijmegen) for referring me to the critical voices raised during the founding stage of the IACM.

³ John Gorski (of the Society of Foreign Missions of the United States, Maryknoll), a professor of Missiology, Ecumenism and Inculturation, taught at the Institute of Theological Studies of the Catholic University of Bolivia in Cochabamba.

sation's first President. The aim of the international association, as emphasised at the time, is to facilitate networking between missiologists and to provide them with support in their research into mission in the light of the Second Vatican Council and in accordance with the Magisterium.

Reference was made to the significance for the IACM of organising future missiological congresses, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It was proposed that the focus should be on examining the reception of *Ad Gentes* in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. However, this did not imply that the mission in Europe and North America was to be bracketed off. It was noted that there are missiological centres in Europe (for example in Sankt Augustin in Germany) which tend to concentrate more on missionary projects in Europe. The importance of the IACM was seen, in particular, in the emphasis it put on missiology as a service to the mission of the Church. Attention was drawn to the need to sensitise priests to missiological studies, to include missiological studies in the curricula of seminaries and to support the development of contextual theologies in "Third World" countries. It was also deemed desirable for the IACM to support local churches in their missionary development. It was pointed out that financial and personnel support from Europe and North America for the missionary activities of the Church in "Third World" countries continued to be of value. Attention was drawn to the significance of anthropological and cultural studies for the development of missiology. Missiological groundwork was called for in order to overcome a geographical or territorial approach to mission. Reference was made, on the one hand, to the role of missiology in the academic curriculum and, on the other, to the importance of missiology for the practical missionary work of the Church (Oborji).

John Gorski was elected President. Other members of the Executive Board to be elected were Teresa Okure (Vice-president), Francis Oborji (Executive Secretary) and Madge Karecki (Treasurer). Silvester Arinaitwe Rwomokubwe (Africa), Lazar Thanuzraj (Asia / Oceania), Eugen Nunnenmacher (Europe), Joao Panzazolo (Latin America) and Bertrand Roy (North America) were elected as regional representatives (Oborji).

Following the First IACM Plenary Assembly the Executive Board met for its first meeting in 2001 in order to agree priorities for its work in the years ahead. Two years later, in July 2003, several Executive Board members met in Maryknoll (New York) to make plans for the Second Plenary Assembly in conjunction with a specialist congress to be held in Cochabamba (Bolivia) in 2004.

Second Plenary Assembly (Cochabamba, Bolivia) in 2004

The Second IACM Plenary Assembly was held from 29 September to 3 October 2004 in Cochabamba (Bolivia). Hosted by the Missiological Institute of the Catholic University in Cochabamba in cooperation with the Diocesan Commission for Mission and Dialogue, it was attended by 73 Catholic missiologists. In 2004, 400 missiolo-

gists were members of the IACM (Lazar, Górski 2006, ix) from all over the world. Four participants came from Africa, seven from Asia, eleven from Europe, three from North America and eighteen from Latin America. Thirty other participants came from the host country, Bolivia (Roy 2005a, 97-100; 2005b, 530-533). The issue addressed by the plenary assembly was "Sharing Diversity in Missiological Research and Education". Lazar Stanislaus und John Gorski had the following to say about the two aspects of the issue: "The first is that desired diversity which is the fruit of inculturating the gospel in the different cultures of the world. Then there is the practical difficulty that we missiologists experience in mutual communication across continental and cultural boundaries." (Lazar, Górski 2006, xi). In the course of the conference Teresa Okure (2006, 37-56) from Nigeria explored the diverse theological language to be found in the New Testament. Joseph Mattam (2006, 37-56) from India made it clear that, in linguistic terms, biblical language outside the Semitic world requires new approaches to translation. Sergei Shirokov (2006, 57-65) from Russia looked at iconography as a vehicle of theological expression that combines theology, worship and the reality of life. Eleazar López (2006, 66-82) from Mexico was strongly in favour of dialogue with the indigenous peoples of America, saying that this was important not only for the indigenous population, but also for the Church of the whole of creation (in view of ecological challenges). In the light of the AIDS pandemic, Lance Nadeau (2006, 83-101) from Kenya called for the development of a new theological language and a theology which does not demonise death but addresses it anew in paschal terms. Guisepe Buono and Patrizia Pelosi (2006, 113-128) examined the challenges posed by bioethics and the need to devise a new missiological language. François Jacques (2006, 129-135) talked about mission in Quebec and the language transformation processes it entailed. John Prior (2006, 136-150) dealt with the connection between language and rites in Eastern Indonesia. Gabriela Zengarini (2006, 151-161), a feminist theologian, said that the theological language she used had its roots in the lived experience of women. In conclusion, Marek Rostkowski (2006, 162-171) addressed the issue of language as an instrument of inculturation. The discussions on the presentations made it clear that a theological language serving the purposes of mission varies with the contexts in which the dialogue between faith and culture takes place (Prior 2005, 157). The IACM documented the presentations given at the Second Plenary Assembly in a volume entitled "Sharing Diversity in Missiological Research and Education" (Prior 2005, 157) and thus rendered them permanently accessible to all members and missiologists. Looking back at the second gathering of the IACM in Cochabamba, John Prior (2005, 157) wrote:

My impression from this 2004 General Assembly is that IACM is already forging an important place in Catholic missiological discourse. As a young association, IACM has still to consolidate administratively and financially. IACM needs to be more diverse in its support rather than rely economically upon a single missionary society. Particular attention will need to be placed upon creating a more balanced and inclusive membership embracing women as well as men, and laity as well as clergy. IACM needs to develop a membership more representative of the dynamic Churches of Africa and Asia.

William LaRousse (USA / Philippines) was elected to succeed John Gorski as IACM President. The new Executive Board elected at the Plenary Assembly also included Eleazar López (Vice-president), Bertrand Roy (Executive Secretary) and Luisa Melo Leyton (Treasurer). Silvester Arinaitwe Rwomokubwe (Africa), Lazar T. Stanislaus (Asia / Oceania), Paul Steffen (Europe), Joaquin Garcia (Latin America) and Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui (North America) were elected as regional representatives (Roy 2005a, 99).

Third Plenary Assembly (Pieniężno, Poland) in 2007

“Sharing the Good News in the Interaction of Cultures: ‘The Word of God grew and multiplied’ (Acts 12, 24)” was the title of the Third IACM Plenary Assembly held in from 28 August to 2 September 2007 at the Seminary of the Divine World Missionaries in Pieniężno. (Poland), which was attended by 66 missiologists from five continents and the Pacific (Kroeger 2007, 459-463). Presentations on the main theme of the conference – two each from Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia – were supplemented by discussions in working groups on “Integral Healing and Reconciliation”, “Cultural Globalization and Asserting Identity”, “Migration” and “Intercultural Communication in the Church”. In addition, meetings were held in the various regional or language groups in order to enhance personal exchanges amongst the participants.

The discussions at the Third Plenary Assembly were conducted in a Trinitarian understanding of mission and a Christological approach, in which reference was made to the different contextual forms of Christology: “Mission seeks to reveal the authentic face of Jesus in diverse cultural contexts. The question of ‘how’ to accomplish this task (what avenues can be employed) perennially remains with the Church” (Kroeger 2007, 462). It was emphasised in the course of the presentations and discussions that mission today can no longer be regarded as a hermeneutical process between a missionary from a mono-cultural background and a homogeneous society. On the contrary, in the age of pluralism (GS 53-62) both the missionary and society are exposed to multicultural influences, albeit in different ways. Pluralism was seen in this context as a asset or blessing of the present which called for situational interaction in specific contexts (Kroeger 2007, 460). Given the cultural complexity of the modern world, the development and cultivation of an appropriate form of communication was identified as a special challenge. It was stressed that respect for the cultural narratives of peoples and attentive listening were just as necessary as a recipient-based form of mission in which due account is taken of people’s needs and concerns. It was also noted that personal communication is best suited to the biblical tradition of the incarnation, although this was explicitly not deemed to be an objection to the use of social means of communication. Finally, attention was drawn to the significance of symbolic communication and of symbolic actions or gestures. It was noted that many people followed this mega-trend in the era of globalisation with concern and felt themselves to be at its mercy. Responding to this concern, a missiologist from Asia proposed a missionary

approach focussing on the biblical tradition and the vision of the Kingdom of God and called for a radical change of perspective: away from the ideology of consumption towards a culture of generosity, away from a culture of individualism towards a culture of hospitality, away from a culture of superficiality towards a culture of inwardness, away from a culture of exclusion towards a culture of solidarity, away from a culture of conflict and violence towards a culture of harmony, away from a culture of information towards a culture of self-observation, and away from a culture of efficient communication towards one of truthful communication (Kroeger 2007, 460).

Lazar T. Stanislaus (India) was elected to succeed William LaRousse as IACM President. Other members elected to the Executive Board were Nicanor Sarmiento (Vice-president), François Jacques (Executive Secretary) and Andrzej Pietrzak (Treasurer). Joseph Ndi-Okalla (Africa), Andrew Recepción (Asia / Oceania), Wojciech Kluj (Europe), Roberto Tomicha (Latin America) and Kevin Hanlon (North America) were elected as regional representatives (IACM 2007-2010, 1-2).

Fourth Plenary Assembly (Tagaytay, Philippines) in 2010

The Fourth IACM Plenary Assembly was held from 27 July to 2 August 2010 at St. Scholastica's Center for Spirituality in Tagaytay (Philippines), was attended by 73 participants from various continents. Its theme "New Life in Jesus in the Areopagus of a Globalized World" was selected in response to John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, in which he talked of cultural sectors as "modern equivalents of the Areopagus" – a reference to Paul's proclamation on the Areopagus (Acts 17, 16-33) (Noggler 2010, 358). The plenary assembly addressed questions of proclamation and witness as well as the strained relationship between dialogue and religion, religious and secular fundamentalism, human rights and ecological justice as well as the challenge posed by indigenous cultures.

The conference began with twelve "continental presentations" (from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania). Working groups were held in parallel on "Proclamation and Witness", "Dialogue and Religions", "Religious and Secular Fundamentalism", "Human Rights and Ecological Justice" and "Indigenous Peoples", which provided plenty of food for missiological thought. This meeting in Tagaytay made it clear once again just how context-dependent theological concepts are. Representatives from Asia favoured "friendship" as a core model of mission, stating that they regarded their minority status not as a burden but as a blessing (Stanislaus 38-39; IACM Synthesis Committee 238). This was a very valuable statement especially for the representatives from Europe, confronted as they are with the phenomenon of secularism. Representatives from other continents, meanwhile, said the context in which they operated was greatly affected by postmodern developments. The representatives from Oceania drew attention to ecological challenges, which were also of relevance for mission-related issues. Fundamentalism was highlighted by the representatives from Africa, in particular, as a major challenge for the mission of the

Church in the third millennium. A valuable contribution from the Latin American theologians was their reference to the fact that the Church by its very nature is always on the way as a pilgrim and that, in view of present-day challenges, there is a need to develop new theological and missiological methodologies (Stanislaus 39).

In the group looking at religious and secular fundamentalism, terms such as humility, simplicity, modesty and renunciation of power left their stamp on a debate which centred around kenosis as the essential characteristic of and main challenge for the Church (Noggler 2010, 358). In the light of the kenotic nature of the Church, the theological challenge was formulated of proceeding from a concept of “Pensiero Debole” (Gianni Vattimo), which regards weakness as a fundamental attitude appropriate to mankind. Another participant to take up the concept of kenosis was Antonio G. Tagle, who in his sermon devoted to “Reflections from Asia” pointed out that the mission of the Church had to be undertaken in the spirit of Jesus and thus in the spirit of kenosis. He described the self-emptying of the Son of God as a renunciation of power and went on to combine the concept of kenosis with an understanding of the discipleship of Jesus in which Christians can open up to others.

The continental presentations made it clear with respect to Asia that proclamation and dialogue were at odds, although in practical experience they were felt to be complementary. Friendship is regarded there as the core model of mission. Given the cultural, religious and social divisions in society, the Church has been given the task of highlighting what unites people and of drawing attention to Asia’s rich social and cultural heritage. Christians’ personal experience of belonging to a religious minority was presented not as a burden but as a blessing.

Drawing on the experiences reported from Asia, the continental presentation from Europe revealed that Christians increasingly regard themselves as a “small flock” in the traditionally Christian countries of Europe. The loss in relevance of the Christian religion or Christian faith was considered to be the result of secularisation and postmodernism. While the continental reports made it clear that, in the age of globalisation, all *Aeropagus* equivalents are affected by postmodernism and secularisation, reference was also made to people’s insatiable thirst for meaning, which poses a challenge for the missionary work of the Church. Mission in Europe was thus bound up with a re-inculturation of the faith. In view of the developments in Europe, missiology needed to proceed from a viable anthropology. The understanding of mission as a “prophetic dialogue” was regarded as an opportunity for the proclamation of the Church. The continental report from Oceania also contained a prophetic reference to the fact that environmental issues and mankind’s responsibility for creation and future generations are of key significance for missionary activities (Noggler 2010, 359-361).

Andrew Recepción (Philippines) was elected to succeed Lazar T. Stanislaus as IACM President. The other members of the Executive Board elected in Tagatay were Nzenizi-Lucie Mboma (Vice-president), Francis-Vincent Anthony (Executive Secretary) and Kevin Hanlon (Treasurer). Godefroid Manunga-Lukokisa (Africa), John Prior (Asia), Theresa D’Orsa (Oceania), Wojciech Kluj (Europe), Oscar Martinez (Latin America) and Nicanor Sarmiento (North America) were elected as regional represent-

atives (IACAM 2010, 4-5). In 2011 Bernadeth Caero Busillos was elected the Latin America representative during a meeting of the IACM Executive Board (IACAM 2011, 2-3).

Following the first meeting of the newly elected Executive Board on 31 July 2010 a second meeting was held from 7 to 11 November 2011 in Rome. A new concept for the IACM website was discussed, consideration was given to the setting up of an electronic journal and an exchange of views was held on the future nature of IACM membership. A survey of the continental representatives revealed that in 2011 the IACM had approximately 40 members in Europe, 29 members in Asia, nine members in Oceania and 25 members in Africa. No figures were available for membership in North and Latin America (IACAM 2011, 3-4). In addition the ground was prepared for the forthcoming plenary assembly, the first to be held on African soil.

Fifth Plenary Assembly (Nairobi, Kenya) in 2013

The Fifth IACM Plenary Assembly was held from 15 to 21 July 2013 at the Spirituality Center of Dimesse Sisters in Karen and was the first to be held on the African continent. Attended by 39 missiologists, it addressed the subject of “*Missio inter gentes*: Challenges and Opportunities”. In addition to discussing the missiological paradigm shift arising from the concept of *missio inter gentes* the plenary assembly looked at the issues of “Healing and Reconciliation”, “Inter-religious Encounter” and “Missionary Education and Upbringing” (Goldman 2015, 550-558).

The keynote speech at the Fifth Plenary Assembly in Nairobi was given by the Asian American missiologist, Jonathan Tan (2014), who in his presentation entitled “*Missio inter gentes*: Theological-missiological Foundations” elaborated on his concept of *missio inter gentes* and advocated a paradigm shift in missionary work. Tan took as his point of departure the minority situation faced by Christians in Asia. He presented this not as a hurdle to be overcome, but as a fact of life requiring sensitivity to the value of harmonious coexistence, which had led to the development of a theology of harmony. Tan urged that Asia’s religious abundance should be seen from a pluralistic religious perspective and that a dialogue should be conducted with the representatives of other religions in order to overcome inhuman, oppressive structures and to engage jointly in the struggle against poverty, corruption, the abuse of power and egotism (Luber 2014, 256). Tan expressly rejected any understanding of mission which might be seen through Asian eyes as a continuation of a colonial way of thinking or of Eurocentric debates on civilisation. He emphasised the importance of a paradigm shift along with esteem for the cultural and religious plurality to be found in Asia. He was critical of the term “*missio ad gentes*”, since it implied a one-way model of communication from the impartor to the recipient. He called for such a model of communication to be replaced by an understanding of “*missio inter gentes*” in which missionaries undertake their activities with and among the people of Asia.

Going into more detail on his concept of *missio inter gentes*, Jonathan Tan made a distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, to which he then added the supplementary term “orthopathy”, which had previously tended to be used in an evangelical environment (Goldman 2015, 553; Solivan 1993). One of the main pillars of the concept of *missio inter gentes* is the relationship between orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy. Orthopathy can be explained in theological terms by God’s sharing in the fate of mankind and by Jesus’s call to people to be emotionally stirred by the need of others, because this “being moved” constitutes an instance of the experience of God (*Deus est caritas*) Tan thus regards orthopathy not just as a necessity in inter-faith dialogue, but also as an appropriate attitude in view of the reality of poverty in Asia (and elsewhere). Tan urged that, social and humanitarian engagement notwithstanding, orthopathy was a key dimension which should not be lost from sight. Account must be consequently be taken of spiritual traditions, aesthetic criteria and cultural motifs which determine people’s everyday lives. Tan was at pains to point out that “pathos” should not be understood as pity, since this would lead to victimisation and assistance-based relations in missionary activities. Orthopathy must consistently be designed to equip people with skills so that they experience a “self-empowering” effect. Only through the interweaving of orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy is it possible to achieve an integral understanding of mission appropriate to the reality of life in Asia. To quote Tan (2014, 28f):

Hence, the *missio inter gentes* paradigm recognizes that, while the witnessing of the Good News of Jesus is an important dimension of mission, in practice this witnessing is exemplified in the values of friendship and trust, relationality and relationship-building, dialogue and consensus, as well as solidarity and orthopathy as constitutive elements of the task of Christian mission in Asia.

The participants in the Fifth Plenary Assembly in Nairobi found Jonathan Tan’s presentation very inspiring in an age in which mission can no longer be understood to mean that missionaries are despatched from the countries of the local churches in the northern hemisphere to evangelise people living in the southern hemisphere. A global, polycentric missionary dynamic has long been in place in which reciprocal relations contribute to an intercultural understanding of mission. The missiologists gathered in Nairobi regarded Jonathan Tan’s synthesis of orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy as an instrument which lays the ground for a differentiated perception of the reality of mission in the post-colonial era which is ultimately rooted in a relational understanding of mission (Vellguth 2017, 190-195). Some participants remarked that *missio inter gentes* implies an understanding of mission which is both in keeping with the times and forward looking and in which the current post-colonial discourse can contribute to further terminological precision (Luber 260). Looking back at Jonathan Tan’s presentation, Markus Luber (257) writes:

In a global perspective the mission paradigm requires a redetermination of the relationship between the local churches. Emphatic solidarity is manifested here in cooperation rooted

in partnership, perceives the mutual dependence involved and replaces paternalistic patterns of behaviour which come about as a result of financial strength or a supposed advance in tradition. The central concept in this vision is *koinonia*.

The conference in Nairobi was also attended by the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who dealt in his contribution with the Bishops' Synod on re-evangelisation and highlighted the impetus the Synod had given to *missio inter gentes*. Tagle stressed the importance of a narrative theology which incorporates one's own history, the history of others and, in particular, the histories of the poor and marginalised (Goldman 2015, 554). Other aspects taken up by the participants in the Fifth Plenary Assembly were matters relating to dialogue, changes in the global religious map and questions of migration. There was also discussion of what topics should be the focus of missiological reflection in the future.

Andrew Recepción (Philippines) was confirmed as IACM President. The other members of the newly elected Board were Nzenizi Lucie Mboma (Vice-president), Francis Vincent Anthony (Executive Secretary) and Kevin Hanlon (Treasurer). Godefroid Manunga-Lukokisa (Africa), Michael Sebastian (Asia), Therese D'Orsa (Oceania), Franciszek Jablonski (Europe), Bernadeth Caero Bustillos (Latin America) and Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui (North America) were elected as regional representatives.

Sixth Plenary Assembly (Pattaya, Thailand) in 2017

The Sixth IACM Plenary Assembly was held from 10 to 15 July 2017 in Pattaya (Thailand). Sixty-six missiologists from a total of 18 countries on all continents devoted their attention to the document entitled "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" (Csiszar). The ecumenical mission document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct" (World Council of Churches; Vellguth 2015, 160-179), signed by representatives of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance in 2011, can be seen as an "inner-Christian code of ethics for mission" (Troll 2011, 293-295). It makes clear what the nature of mission should be, particularly in respect of relations with other religions.

Six years after the ceremonial signing of this ecumenical mission document it was the focus of discussion at the IACM Plenary Assembly. First of all, Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage (2017, 13-19), Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, looked at the context and historical background of the ecumenical mission document, which can be seen as a response to conflicts in Sri Lanka and India triggered by conversions deemed to be "unethical" (Prior 2017, 321). Kankanamalage described the controversy over conversions in Sri Lanka in the early 1990s as well as the disputes relating to the anti-conversion laws passed in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu in 2002, which were repealed two years later

after being abused as an instrument in personal quarrels. He dealt in detail with the discussion process and development of the mission document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct”. It all began in 2003 and led in June 2011 to the signing of the document by Jean-Louis Pierre Tauran (President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), Geoff Tunnicliffe (World Evangelical Alliance) and Olav Fykse Tveit (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches) (Vellguth 2014; 2015). Kankanamalage pointed out, however, that the conversion controversy was more than just a religious issue: “Social, cultural and economic factors are also involved, since in the case of Christians, for example, conversion facilitates social advancement, intra-caste mobility and fair treatment.” Kankanamalage (2017, 18) said that conversions in Asia were often accompanied by painful memories of colonial oppression, church expansion and political manipulation. A code of conduct for church missionary work was therefore all the more important. He praised the document for the considerable influence it had exerted on Christian mission throughout the world, saying that the reservations and problems associated with Christian witness had been discussed in an ecumenical and interreligious context when the mission document was drawn up.

Klaus Krämer (2017, 20-25), President of missio Aachen, examined the limits to Christian witness in religious, cultural and social contexts. He looked at the structure of the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct” which begins by setting out the “basis” for an understanding of mission, goes on to describe twelve “principles” of Christian mission and concludes by formulating several “recommendations”. “The normative exemplary character of Jesus’ proclamation means that, whenever Christians engage in inappropriate methods of missionary work, they cast a shadow on or ‘betray’ the Gospel itself as a message of joy and liberation” (Krämer 2017, 21), said Krämer (2017, 22) in a reference to incorrect conduct in the missionary activities of the Church. He pointed to the contextual nature of Christian mission and described the contexts as providing “exciting challenges”. He was talking here about social, cultural and religious contexts and – in an indirect reference to the triple dialogue of the FABC – made it clear that Christian mission today must be conceived of as a dialogue. “The dialogue paradigm matches the way in which God presents himself to human beings. The whole of salvation history can thus be seen as a dialogue of salvation between God and human beings which begins with the Exodus event and culminates in the saving action of God in Jesus Christ.” (Krämer 2017, 24). Krämer (2017, 25) emphasised that witness to the Christian faith must take place in the form of dialogue, since man’s relationship with God was structured in the form of a dialogue. He did not regard this as connoting any fundamental renunciation of the truth to which the Christian faith lays claim in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. However, this claim should not be asserted in any authoritarian way, he said, but should rather be incorporated in the dialogue through the bearing of witness. Finally, he argued that, following the signing of the ecumenical missionary document

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Recommendations for Conduct” it was important not to leave matters there, but to engage in dialogue with other religious communities “in order to make a contribution towards peaceful coexistence between people of different religions and cultures in our multi-religious world.

Francis-Vincent Anthony (2017, 26-32) then examined the causes, prevention and resolution of religious conflicts in India. In doing so he made reference to two empirical studies carried out in India’s multi-religious environment (Anthony, Hermans, Sterkens; Amalodoss). In his presentation he dealt with religious factors which exert an influence on religious conflicts and described possibilities of both conflict prevention and conflict resolution through Christian witness. Gennie Khury, representing the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, concentrated on the conflict situation facing refugees and highlighted the specific vulnerability of women (Prior 2017, 2-3, 321-328, 326-327). Khury made it clear that, as a result of conflicts and cultural barriers, woman often have no access to the public space and that reconciliation processes are mostly male-dominated. In view of conflicts and violence – not only in Asia – she argued in favour of gender sensitivity, gender justice and gender equality as an essential element of reconciliation processes.

Parallel to the plenary presentations at this IACM conference discussions were again held in various thematic groups. In addition, the participants from the various continents gathered for continental meetings. Looking back on the presentations and discussions in Pattaya, John Prior (2017, 2-3, 321-328, 326-328) noted:

[...] the sixth IACM conference called us to re-invent ourselves as practical missionaries and as academic scholars engaged in mission. We need to develop skills for dialogue, and to witness to our faith with an openness to others. The plenary papers, panel and plenary discussions provide us with much material with which we can re-read our experience and so face the future as listeners and learners with a stronger sense of history. Key terms emerged in our sharing such as advocacy, empowerment and awareness building.

Crucial elements of the IACM plenary assemblies are not just the thematic focus chosen and the discussions among experts, but also the atmosphere and, equally as important, the choice of conference venue. The Sixth IACM Plenary Assembly, for example, was held at a Redemptorist-run institution in Pattaya where many physically handicapped people are employed and this naturally had an influence on the character of the mission conference. Following the Plenary Assembly in Thailand Patrick McInerney wrote:

[...] We have been immersed in this living parable of mission, where the physically-challenged witness to the attitudes and dispositions we ourselves need as Christian witnesses in a multi-religious and multi-cultural world. Facing an unprecedented situation of communal conflict and ecological and environmental destruction, we are being called in “bold humility” (David Bosch) to re-imagine Christian witness as strangers in another’s home and be open to embrace a new paradigm of mission.

Wojciech Kluj was elected as the IACM President. The Executive Board members elected at the Plenary Assembly also included Markus Lubber (Vice-president), Rocco Viviano (Executive Secretary) and Kevin Hanlon (Treasurer). Frederick Tusin-gire (Africa), Antonio Marqueses (Asia), Therese D'Orsa (Oceania) and Bryan Lobo (Europe) were elected as regional representatives. Kevin Hanlon declared his willingness to serve as a liaison officer for Latin America and North America.

Conclusion

The Seventh Plenary Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists will probably be held in Europe. Along with the challenge of finding a theme for the assembly which tackles the key missiological issues and challenges of the present, it will need to address the issue of revitalising the IACM. The continental networks, in particular, must be strengthened and their mutual contacts intensified. A meeting of the European continental group (in cooperation with the European continental group of the International Association for Mission Studies – IAMS) is planned for 23 to 27 August 2019 in Sankt Augustin (Germany). It would be helpful if the continental networks were to organise meetings in between the IACM plenary assemblies, at which missiological issues can be discussed at continental level, projects⁴ or cooperation schemes initiated and contextual impetus provided for the forthcoming IACM plenary assemblies. It was noticeable at the meetings of the continental groups at the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Pattaya that there was no gathering of the Latin American continental groups. The last plenary assembly was also attended by only a handful of African missiologists. As regards the future of the IACM, special emphasis must be given to revitalising the continental groups as well as to more intensive networking between the IACM and the missiologists and missiological institutions on the South American and African continents.

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⁴ Wojciech Kluj, Klaus Vellguth and Frans Wijzen have recently taken the initiative at the European level of publishing a ‘European Handbook of Catholic Missiology’ (working title) in cooperation with the IACM and the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies.

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